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NEWS RELEASE

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POWER COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$5.9 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Last year, Power County residents and businesses received \$5.9 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 7,400 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Power County ranks number 23 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$799 for every man, woman and child residing in Power County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Power County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive and less dependent on government assistance. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

“This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing,” adds Kurtz. “By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn’t just me pounding my chest. That’s what community leaders tell us.”

Power County Commissioner Vicki Meadows says, “These programs are definitely important to our county. We have a lot of minimum wage jobs here. People would starve without the Food Stamp program. These programs serve a third of our county.”

More than 1,200 people receive Medicaid services in Power County. The Department’s Medicaid Division spent more than \$4.4 million on health care for residents of the county. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Rockland Pharmacy in American Falls. “Between 15-20 percent of our prescriptions are through Medicaid. This is a big account for us,” says store owner Rod Tucker. “We need to prevent long term medical problems, so we need to start some people on drugs earlier to prevent more expense in the long term with illnesses like diabetes. In the long run we’re going to have healthier people. We’re trying to prevent problems down the road. Without a doubt, (Medicaid) is an investment in my store and the community.”

The story is much the same at Harms Memorial Hospital which received \$168,000 in extra payments called Federal Upper Payment Limits and Disproportionate Share last year. The payments are in addition to inpatient and outpatient fees paid to the hospital for treatment of Medicaid clients. These programs compensate hospitals for low Medicaid reimbursement. The extra money can be used for any purpose so anyone using the hospital can potentially benefit from those dollars.

“We fold it into our operations to help subsidize the low income or uninsured who primarily come into our emergency room,” says Chief Financial Officer Sandy Lehman. “We average about six to seven visits per day and because we have to have providers and staff on call, it gets very expensive. (These FUPL and DSH payments) are always important to the hospital.” All Medicaid payments to the hospital totaled \$258,000.

Power County residents received \$705,000 in Food Stamps to help feed their families — \$140,000 more than in 2003. The Food Stamp program served 700 people in 2004 — 100 more than in the previous year.

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz adds, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(Editors: Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Nick Arambarri at 239-6280 for more information.)

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investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**